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ABSTRACT

In 1983 the National Office of Job Corps conducted a review of Job Corps vocational offerings and outcomes for fiscal year 1982. Based on a review of Job Corps procedures identifying emerging occupations, assessing training needs, developing curricula, and implementing training programs, the project researchers developed a series of recommendations aimed at improving Job Corps vocational education offerings and delivery systems. These recommendations included calls for initiating procedures to implement review findings, for developing and implementing a system for biennial training program review, for developing center contacts with local labor market sources, and for conducting follow-up research studies. In addition, the researchers identified a series of new occupations with potential for addition to Job Corps vocational training offerings. (MN)

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JOB CORPS

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION OFFERINGS REVIEW

Documentation Report No. 7

Continuation of Vocational Education Offerings Review Activity

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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September 1983

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Documentation Report No. 7

Continuation of Vocational Education Offerings Review Activity

		Page
I.	Problems in the 1983 Vocational Education Offerings Review Execution	1
II.	The Situation in FY 1984	3
III.	Options for Continuing the Vocational Education Offerings Review Activity	3

Documentation Report No. 7

Continuation of Vocational Education Offerings
Review Activity

I. Problems in the 1983 Vocational Education Offerings Review Execution

The several problems enumerated in this section are not intended as criticisms of the Job Corps operation or staff. They are mentioned only to help guide further reviews of this type on issues to overcome or avoid. These problems are presented in four groups: operations-related, program data base, occupational demand expectations, and study dynamics. Most have been described in the appropriate preceding Documentation Reports.

A. Operations-Related

1. The definition of a "step-off" level occupation is not centrally established and practice varies among centers.

2. There is ambiguity in the identification of occupations in which corpsmembers are trained. Some centers assign "step-off" level occupations to completers (supposed to be those corpsmembers enrolled for 90 days or more who complete the training objective they established mutually with Job Corps counselors when first enrolled). Others do not, and indeed report some early dropouts (those leaving Job Corps in less than 90 days) as trainees in fairly advanced occupations.

3. The practice of assigning "the best possible" occupational label to corpsmembers when they terminated, based upon the work competencies they have achieved in their training, apparently leads to disparate practices in reporting the occupations (or occupational objectives) in which corpsmembers were trained. Some corpsmembers thus, appear to be labeled and reported as trained in very low skill occupations with very short minimal training time, which probably would not meet reasonable criteria for an occupation worthy to be taught in Job Corps.

4. A current inventory of Job Corps occupational training is not maintained.

5. The training curricula of different Centers training corpsmembers in what is reported as the same occupation appear likely to be quite different, at least in some instances.

6. Job Corps' recruitment and assignment policy results in large numbers of corpsmembers being enrolled in Centers not in their state of residence; and a considerable number outside of their DOL region of residence. As a consequence, many Centers provide training to sizable numbers of corpsmembers from other states. Moreover, a sizable fraction of corpsmembers do not return to their original place of residence when they leave Job Corps. Therefore, the problem of aligning occupational training offerings with employment demand in the labor market -- and analysis of such expected future demand to guide current training decisions -- is most difficult.

B. Program Data Base

1. Occupational training identification assigned to corpsmembers is inconsistent, more than occasionally, with the training programs Centers report they are offering.

2. The Job Corps MIS was restored to full capability only at the beginning of FY 1982; consequently, it was not possible for the present study (but it will be for subsequent reviews) to identify the socio-economic characteristics of corpsmembers recorded at time of entry into Job Corps with the corpsmembers' training occupation recorded after exit. This precluded regression analysis to adjust raw outcomes for important differences in trainee characteristics which are expected to affect job placement.

3. Financial data -- costs of vocational training -- by occupations of training are not required to be maintained by Centers. Only total vocational costs, and some functional subdivisions are required. The special survey of Centers by which occupational training costs were collected may not have evoked a consistent method of cost estimation from Center to Center. Certainly there was wide variation of costs in training for nominally the same occupations, even from region to region.

4. Limitation of program "research" to data available through program operating statistics in the MIS has some shortcomings. The time periods on which the data are based are different for financial data (fairly rigorous fiscal years) and program data (end of reporting period lags over into next year fiscal, particularly for data from the Placement

Status Report -- identifying training occupations which can be delayed six months or more). Additionally, the costs reported are those incurred in the fiscal year while the training output -- corpsmembers trained, job placed, etc., are to an unknown extent the product of training costs incurred in the prior year.

C. Occupational Demand Expectations

1. The only data available, within reasonable time and staff expenditures, for anticipating labor market demand, occupation by occupation were the BLS projects of occupational employment growth, nationwide, 1980 to 1990, published in 1981. State and/or area occupational employment projections, reasonably consistent for all jurisdictions, were not available. State data might be developed given enough lead time and perhaps funding, for a future study of this kind.

2. Occupational information from different sources is frequently based on different definitions of many occupations, a situation which introduces ambiguities into the analysis. Perhaps in the future, all systems will use the Standard Occupational Classification structure.

3. Absence of comparable labor market area projections of future occupational employment precludes national analysis of substate areas' labor market demand for purposes of assessing the relation of training occupations to "the labor market." It is difficult enough to try to appraise occupational demand in the labor market at each Center when corpsmember trainees come from diverse geographical areas, and many do not return to their original residence.

4. There is no viable data base for estimating "benefits" -- i.e., increases of earnings -- by occupation.

D. Study Dynamics

The staffing structure of the current study is at best awkward. The support contractor does not have viable control over the number of staff or professional qualifications, data sources, etc., to properly be held accountable for delivery of a final product. The study plan developed in-house before the support contract was awarded was a reflection more of

what ETA management would have liked to have than of what a sober assessment of the data sources available could yield. The consequent on-going adjustment of study objectives as staff work revealed the limitations of available data -- in the recutting of the coat to fit the cloth -- resulted in additional ambiguity.

II. The Situation in FY 1984

1. The experience of FY 1983 corpsmember trainees will already be in the MIS (except for a considerable amount of placement -- hence training occupation identification) by the time any follow-up vocational offerings review process can be initiated. Accordingly, all the problems encountered in the review of FY 1982 trainees would be encountered (e.g., the corpsmember occupational coding verification/correction required).

2. New BLS projections of occupational employment change to 1995 will become available probably in October or November 1983.

3. Additional data will be available from the MIS for FY 1982 and FY 1983 terminees, from merging the enrollee characteristics computer file and the placement record file to produce corpsmember characteristics by occupation of training. This will permit more sophisticated analysis of outcomes -- noticeably job placement -- by occupation.

4. Some changes are being introduced in Center training occupations in FY 1984 as a result of preliminary findings of the vocational education offerings review. More changes may well be instituted by mid-year following completion of the review. Thus, corpsmember occupations of training may change, perhaps only marginally, in FY 1984, from FY 1982; they probably did not change much in FY 1983.

III. Options for Continuing the Vocational Education Offerings Review Activity

The examination of Job Corps performance by occupation of vocational training appears to have been a productive undertaking, notwithstanding the problems and limitations. Continual vigilance in improving program cost-effectiveness is always warranted and continued periodic review

of performance by occupation is one (certainly not the only) way of working toward that goal. Indeed, since the raw data in this study indicate relatively lower job placement rates among corpswomen than among corpsmen, especially in the largest training occupations, cost-effectiveness might be most quickly improved by some concentrated effort to place female corpsmembers in jobs upon their termination from Job Corps.

One possible focus of a continuing vocational education offerings review, on which there seem to be no options, is not to repeat the 1983 study of FY 1983 corpsmember training in 1984 on FY 1983 training. The only change probably to make the results of such a repetition marginally useful would be the more bullish labor market during calendar 1983 which could be expected to improve job placement rates. This would be but a small gain and probably would not warrant the expenditures of scarce staff time and the dollar resources that would be necessary to accomplish it.

There are three broad alternatives for pursuing the activity in the new fiscal year. These alternatives assume that implementation of whatever decisions management makes concerning revising existing training occupations will be carried out as a regular Job Corps staff function and not a continuation of the review activity.

A. Continue the staff study approach, with contractor support, in pursuit of one or more of the following objectives:

   1. Reanalyze the FY 1982 terminee group on the basis of the verified/corrected occupational designations, with added data from merging the files to produce corpsmember characteristics by occupation.

   2. Assess the desirability of corpsmember geographical relocation to a new place of residence following termination from Job Corps and the role of National Contractors vs. other training providers in promoting it.

3. Extend the analysis of FY 1982 training performance, using enhanced data base as per item 1 above, to try to determine whether the lower job placement rates of female corpsmembers are due to labor market discrimination against women, the selection of occupations in which corpswomen are almost exclusively enrolled, or some other factor, e.g., the much larger withdrawal of females from the labor force when they leave Job Corps, possibly associated with whether or not they have children.

4. Assess the quality and scope of skill training provided in VST as against the "classroom" method.

5. Assess the quality and scope of training provided in maintaining and operating the Centers (e.g., Cook) as against training in the same occupations via "classroom" pedagogical techniques.

6. Assess whether occupation of training is a significant input variable influencing job placement output, whether duration of stay in Job Corps is as significant or more significant than occupation of training, and if occupation of training is a significant influence on duration of stay in Job Corps.

B. Undertake totally contracted "special studies" in lieu of staff studies to illuminate selected problems or issues. In this context "special studies" is used to connote the following activities performed by the contract researcher, at least the first of which -- research design -- could be the subject of competition among proposers: Develop a research design suited to elucidate the research issues identified by staff; devise data collection instruments; collect, process, and analyze data pursuant to approved research design. "Staff study" is meant to connote basically relying upon operating data mostly from the MIS and established financial reports organized and analyzed by Job Corps staff to learn as much as may be learned from those limited sources about any given problem of policy issue.

In addition to most of the topics listed under A above, the following might be investigated:

1. Assess relative cost-effectiveness of different approaches to providing corpsmember training at the Center level, e.g., training provided by Center staff, training contracted (by the Center) to a proprietary training institution, training procured from community colleges, training provided (probably under a reimbursable arrangement) by the local JTPA service delivery agent, or other.

2. Undertake a cost-benefit analysis of Job Corps training by major occupation (i.e., the occupations in which the majority of corpsmembers are trained), and/or the development of a psuedo cost-benefit analysis technique, relying on short-term indicators as a proxy of earnings benefit, suitable for use by Job Corps staff on a continuing basis as an assessment tool for appraisal of Center, training contractor, regional, or overall occupational training performance.

C. Address Job Corps staff resources to developing policy positions and preparing policy issuances to rectify operational practices which seem counterproductive from the viewpoint of rationalizing vocational education offerings. For example, if cost data by occupation are deemed important and will be collected again someday by mail survey of the Centers, staff should develop revised reporting requirements to assure that Centers maintain such data in their cost accounting systems (even though it may not be reported regularly). In addition, award a design contract to develop a vocational education offerings review study design for implementation in FY 1985. Develop a longer term Job Corps research agenda to be pursued both in-house and through contracted research efforts, implemented perhaps by or in conjunction with ETA, Office of Research and Evaluation.